

Shift End

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Summary: The regime of terror in City 17 seems endless - but not only the citizens are affected. A war lies up ahead, and the combine arm for an upcoming battle. One metrocop however, has yet to choose his side in this war.

Shift End

**_A.N.: This is my very first attempt on a Half-Life 2 story. I really liked the Civil Protection in the game, and found the wiki articles about them very inspiring. So this story will be about one of them, giving you a view on what's going on inside his head and why he chose to join CP._ **

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><p>Chapter 1

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><p>Like every other day, Metrocop 42 started out early in the morning, went to the police station to receive a meal, gathered his uniform and began his daily shift. Today he was ordered to patrol sector 18, a zone near the eastern borders of City 17. For safety and mutual control reasons, a second metrocop would accompany him for the rest of the day, unless given different orders.<p>

Metrocop 59 followed him aboard the train, claimed one of the many free seats and picked up a newspaper that lay there. A few times he glanced at 42 who sat on the opposite seat, but didn't say a word. As the train arrived at sector 18, they exited through its narrow sliding door and made their way to the border. Just as they arrived at their destination, the guy finally spoke.

"I don't know about you, but I really need a drink."

"Get me a fizz while you're at it," 42 spontaneously told him.

"Get a fizz yourself, idiot. I'm not your slave!" the other guy snarled in response.

Metrocop 42 sighed in annoyance; then an idea sparked in his head.

"I'll pay for both if you bring two."

"Alright, fine, geez. See ya later."

With that, 59 left him alone. 42 didn't know this guy, but as long as a partner was half-decent to work with it didn't really matter to him. The combine ensured that the metrocops would get a different partner every day; probably to keep them from developing emotional bonds.

42 didn't consider himself a very emotional guy. In fact, he could barely feel any emotions at all. A deep, all-consuming emptiness had taken root inside him, and with every day he spent on duty it seemed to extend a little. But he had not always been this way.

About 20 years ago, before the aliens had taken over the planet, he lived a life of happiness and joy. Even though he was just 6 years old at that time, he could still remember the beautiful farm he lived on; the horses, the sheep, the vibrant evening sky and the smile of his mother when she arrived home.

Back in those days, he still went by the name Carter.

Every day his mother would cook an incomparably delicious meal, and he would sit at the dining table with her, his father and his little baby sister. Josie was only one year old at that time, and Carter was often relied upon to take care of her because his father had his work cut out on the farm and his mother was mostly out, selling their wares in town. But the boy didn't mind spending time with his little blonde sister, because she wouldn't beg him to share his toys or be unfair to him like the other kids from school.

Josie always gave him this feeling of being important to someone, and sometimes he thought that his only purpose was to keep her safe and to protect this little, fragile being; this angel that couldn't fly yet. To be charged with this task made him feel satisfied.

But when the day of the invasion came, everything changed. Despite his perpetual endeavors to repress the memories, painful fragments of the horrible events from that night remained.

Portals had opened everywhere, releasing nightmarish creatures that roamed the land. The crash of a window shattering woke Carter from his sleep, and while he hid under his bed, he watched as one of them killed his dear mother. He remembered how his father rushed in with Josie in his arm and dragged him along.

All hell broke loose around the world as the apocalypse transpired. Raging fires lit up the night, revealing silhouettes of horrifying monsters and dead animals that failed to break free and escape their terrible fate.

As Carter and his remaining family fled to the city, they were

spotted by an outlandish creature that jumped on his father, knocking Josie from his arms. She slumped on the ground, crying in terror. The moment the boy looked back, that thing was already in the process of tearing out his father's guts. With tears in his eyes, Carter took a big rock and smashed it into the head of the ugly beast until long after it stopped moving, but for his father it was already too late. Carter could still recall the dying words that came from his father's lips as the boy knelt down beside him, crying his soul out. "Shh... everything will be alright, but you have to be strong now," he was told. "Take Josie, head to the city and... Protect her with your life."

After picking up his distraught sister, Carter ran far away. Soon he spotted more monsters in the corner of his eye and some started chasing him, but he didn't turn around or stop. He couldn't remember how he and his sister had made it to the city alive, but when they finally arrived, armed men guarding the borders blew his pursuers' brains out.

The little boy and his sister stayed with these people until soldiers came to take them away. The people of the town were evacuated and forced to leave their homes, pets and possessions behind, the soldiers making their job easier by promising the people equal replacements for their belongings. Along with them, Carter and Josie were taken to the station, where they went aboard a train that should take them somewhere safer.

After a few transfers to other trains and a few people boarding along the way, they arrived at their final destination, which was the place they now call City 17.

From that day on, he and his little sister shared an apartment there with a nice old lady called Cassie. She took care of them like a mother would, and as the years passed Josie grew up to be a beautiful teenager while Carter began a job in an office, working eight boring hours a day.

Josie used to be very adventurous, and would often climb fences and explore forbidden areas. It was her brother's eighteenth birthday when something happened that would change their lives forever.

There was an old factory where the siblings often went to play or talk, because it stood abandoned since a few years and the few metrocops patrolling the area only rarely passed by. Josie had originally discovered it, but she liked to share all her findings with her dear brother.

"Hey brother, you'll never guess what I found this morning!", she cheered, barely able to contain herself.

"Hmm... is it a radio?", Carter asked half-heartedly, watching her with a slightly tilted head.

"No..." she huffed and dropped her arms. "Look, I'll give you a hint: It's something no one else in the city has. Well, at least not the normal folks."

"A working gaming console?"

"Again no. This is at least a thousand times cooler!" she told

him.

"I have not the slightest idea..." he mumbled after a while.

"Whatever... Just see it for yourself!" she said in a happy tone and took a banana-shaped metal body out of her bag.

"Woah..." the man gaped at the sight.

"I told you it was going to be totally awesome!"

"Is that... a manhack?", he asked the girl. "Where did you find it?"

"Yes, it is! One of those lame ass CPs left it laying on the wall behind him while cleaning his weapon, so I snagged it away. Dumbass didn't even notice it was missing!" she laughed. "Now come, let's pull it up and let it fly!"

"Wait!" Carter almost yelled and cringed afterward, hoping that no CPs had just heard him.

"What is it?"

"Look... I'm not sure we should really do that."

"Why not?"

"We're not allowed to have this, in fact we could get into really big trouble if the CPs find out you stole one of their manhacks. What if we get caught?"

"Oh brother... don't be so lame! Did you ever see any CPs come here before?", she inquired with a doubting expression on her face.

"Didn't think so."

"I'm trying to make a point here. They probably have their reasons for restricting us from owning weapons."

The girl sighed in annoyance of her brother's stiffness.

"Come on... It's your birthday! Enjoy your life a little more while you're still young! What do you think?"

However, Carter kept staring at her with a concerned expression.

"Ugh... I knew this would happen. You're starting to become more and more like one of those boring old geezers who block out all the fun from their lives because they think it's too dangerous for them. Some don't even leave their homes anymore in fear of falling on their nose or breaking a leg. But I'm going to show you that this thing ain't as dangerous as everyone thinks it is. Just look at it! It's just a toy."

"A toy with razor blades," the man added.

"Ohh! My big brother is afraid of razor blades! Such a pussy!" she mocked him.

"What... I'm not afraid of razor blades! How else would I be shaving my face?"

"Whatever. I'm gonna launch it into the air now just to prove to you how harmless this thing is," she told him and held the device up by the handle on its bottom.

Having nothing intelligent left to say, Carter didn't raise any further objection and watched as his sister moved her thumb over the only button on the manhack's metal body and pressed it.

With a click, parts of its shell flipped open and the fan of blades started rotating. A red scanning eye glowed up in the center of its body, making the machine seem like a living creature. It gave the older brother a queasy feeling, but he tried his best to hide it.

Tentatively the girl released her grip around it, and at a pace as delicate as the one of a feather, the drone soared high up into the air above their heads. Then it started making its way around the big room.

"Wow... This is amazing," Carter couldn't help but word his amazement.

"Told ya," his sister said and hit him on the back with her hand.

"How do you control it?"

"I don't. It flies off on its own, where ever it thinks is the right way to go."

"You just made that sounds so melancholic."

"Shut up."

"Hey look, it's flying into the hallway," Carter noticed. "Let's follow it and see where it goes."

Josie just nodded and was the first one to leave her spot.

"This is odd... I can't hear it anymore," her brother told her as they trotted across the room.

It wasn't hard to spot the white and red blinking manhack in the dusky hallway. The drone seemed to have gotten stuck between two pipes and had stopped moving.

"Be careful sis..."

"Yeah yeah," she waved him off as she approached it warily.

She tried to pull it out, but it wouldn't move. After turning and jolting it a little, it was finally lose again â€“ but as the fan blades started spinning unexpectedly, they cut a tiny slit into the pipe and sent a white liquid spraying into the girls face. Josie yelped up in fright, tumbling down to the ground backwards and pressing her hand on her face.

In an instant Carter was by her side, trying to find out why she was clutching her left eye, crying and trembling all over.

"Hey Josie, what's wrong? Are you hurt? Talk to me, please!", the man pleaded, but she continued writhing in pain and crying.

As he heard the rotating blade becoming louder, he turned his head and got up, trying to make out the source of the sound.

The manhack was still in the air, beeping out of control as it came flying his way, the scanner eye glaring at him fiercely. The man picked up a pipe lying on the ground next to him and as the device closed in, he lunged out, clenched his teeth and shattered the drone in an accurate blow.

"Come, Josie..." he spoke, dropped the pipe and helped the girl up, hooking in on her arm. "I'm taking you home to auntie Cassie."

"Nooo...", she whimpered as she stumbled along. "She will be mad..."

"Shh... It will be alright. I'll take care of that," Carter sincerely promised her.

Three days had passed, but Josie's eye didn't recover. Auntie Cas was very troubled by Josie's state, but the fact that the child could remain blind in one eye was the least of her concerns. What worried her more was what the Combine would do to her once they found out.

Carter knew why the Combine shut down all the hospitals. Humans were never of much value to them and were merely slaves in their eyes, tools that would do work for them; and if somebody got sick or injured too severely, they would be send to Nova Prospekt - the place every citizen feared. Even the CPs told each other horror stories about that place, each one fearing that they would eventually end up there. But what the Combine really did to the humans who were sent there was far worse than every child's nightmares.

The people of the city knew that nobody who was sent there ever came back. At least, not with their former brain and organs. The Combine replaced them with wires, gizmos and pipes with the idea to create a super-human that is far more resilient and easier to control than regular people. They call that process an upgrade, that would physically enhance every human body, but in the eyes of the people these... things... are merely dead pieces of pale human meat forcefully cut open and infused with alien technology.

Anyway, the Combine would find out sooner or later and come for Josie. With certainty there was nothing the little family could do to prevent it " or so it seemed. Carter spent the majority of his spare time doing research on the community rights and what ranks they applied to, and as he found out more and more about it, he started to devise a plan in his head.

Then the night came when the metrocops knocked on the apartment door to take in Josie.

It was Carter who let the officer in, followed by two others while one stood at the door.

"Don't take her with you, please!", Auntie Cassie pleaded at the man in uniform, but she was aggressively pushed away with a forceful thrust.

She slid down with her back against the wall and started whimpering.

Carter followed the others and watched as they pulled Josie out of her room by the arm, the girl hopelessly flailing against the CP's strong grasp.

"Is this the girl we're supposed to take in?" the cop asked the CP holding her, his voice sounding strange as it passed through the voice distorther in his gas mask.

"Affirmative. Citizen 1833, registered for a ride to Nova Prospekt for losing an eye and thus breaking rule 185: Living with a handicap that limits the individual in his ability to work," the CP confirmed.

"Good. Our work is done here, let's leave," the captain told the other two shortly.

After checking his squad he turned around and wanted to pass through the door, but Carter still stood there.

"Get out of the way, Citizen 1832," the officer commanded.

"Wait...!" the man yelled, his voice trembling from nervousness.
"Please take a moment and listen to what I have to say..."

The officers exchanged a glance, the girl fearfully observing the situation.

"You have five minutes to explain yourself," the metrocop finally approved, and Carter's heart jumped with hope.

Forthwith he went to get a stack of papers - most of which he'd printed out in his office - and showed them to the cop, explaining to him what he had in mind. The minutes passed as Carter worked on an offer as exchange for sparing his sister from the fate awaiting her at Nova Prospekt. Eventually the cop handed him a card with an address, shook his hand and gave his colleague a short sign. With that he released the girl from his grip, and the squad left the apartment.

After they were gone, Josie and Cassie blankly looked at each other, then stared at Carter with an expression of worry on their faces.

"What have you done...?" the young girl gasped, tears welling in her eyes.

"Don't worry, sis. Everything is going to be alright. I can guarantee that both of you will be safe from now on," he shakily told the two and hugged them tightly. "I'm going to join Civil Protection."

From that day on, Carter was to be addressed as Metrocop Number 42. For his efforts he earned his family a better place to live in, away from the apartment blocks, while he was assigned to a nice little apartment in the citadel; but most important was his Pyrrhic victory over the fight for his beloved sister's life.

Nowadays Nr. 42 often reflected back on the old times. Sometimes those memories seemed to be the only thing that kept him from going insane, especially because he wasn't allowed to see his sister more than once a week. Not long ago auntie Cassie's life tragically ended with a fall from the top of the stairs. Josie had been in the shower when it happened and was far more affected by her decease than he, probably because she had spent her entire life with her.

Now that Cassie was gone, Josie lived completely alone in the big apartment and each time her brother came to visit, he saw how lonely and sad she had become. She needed her brother, but his job didn't allow them to meet more often, and all they could do was linger after the old times.

He missed the old life they had; back then he actually did things he could feel proud of. But nowadays his life mainly consisted of patrolling and keeping protesting citizens in rein with his stun stick, only because they wanted the freedom so due to them.

In his early months he often thought about what would happen if he decided to quit the job, but he was profoundly convinced that it would never come to this, because that would instantly divest him and his family of the safety and support this job implicated.

Quitting this job would also mean that he would willingly choose to downgrade himself to one of the citizens the metrocops pushed around and beat every day. On top of that there was a high chance that as an ex-metrocop, he would fall victim to aggressive citizens who seek revenge for injustice done to them by the Civil Protection.

There was no valid reason for this regime of terror other than the hate Civil Protection put into their actions and their inability of stepping back; not to mention the fear of what the Combine would do to them if they dared to resist.

There simply was no other way, Nr. 42 was well aware of that; and like many others he had learned to accept the fact that this was the only path he will ever go, no matter how questionable its morality may be.

In moments of doubt Nr. 42 always reflected in his mind what was really important to him — the life of his sister, or the life of one of those filthy protesting citizens — and he instantly knew what to do.

Eventually he stopped caring about what was right or wrong, and the more rebellious citizens he beat up or even killed, the more his work rendered him numb until he didn't even feel a spark of regret anymore as he killed a woman at the front line of a crowd of insurgents one day.

However, he wondered how much longer the citizens would acquiesce in all of this.

"Hey. Hey man, are you alive?" 59 talked to him, waking 42 from his thoughts with a nudge to the helmet with his stunstick.

Good thing it was in off-state, or it would have hurt like hell. Some idiot had smacked him to the head with a sparking stunstick before, and he could say that it wasn't a very pleasant experience.

"Yeah, I was just caught in thoughts," 42 spluttered and accepted the can handed to him. "Thanks."

"No problem, and I hope the thoughts were amusing. This is going to be a long day..."

The midday sun stood high above the sky, burning down relentlessly on the dark armor of the patrolling metrocops, as a radio call came through.

"Attention protection teams! Armed rebel squad spotted on the way to sector 19. Counting 24 individuals. Combine special forces are being flown in. All protection teams from the surrounding areas including sector 18 and sector 17 are to fall in within ten minutes, secure the area and let no rebels through. Noncompliance and unpunctuality will result in punishment."

"Well I guess this is our lucky day. We're finally gonna get to see some action," Nr. 59 commented in a ridiculously dull tone. Not like he was capable of really showing much expression speaking through that voice distorther anyways.

"We'll see if it's going to be fun or not once we get there," Metrocop 42 said sternly and set down his drink.

After the duo picked up their SMGs they exchanged a short glance and nodded to show each other that they're ready for action. Then they hit the trail.

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><p>...To be continued.

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><p>Reviews and favs might make the next chapter come sooner.**

Credits to Creep for test-reading!

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file.